Jewish Tribune – Bo

**The Ripple Effect**

A great question to ask your Shabbos or seder table is which of the ten makkos do you fear the most. It certainly brings the plagues to life and makes you picture them better.

Interestingly, for many it is the penultimate plague of choshech – darkness.

The possuk (Shemos 10,22) says:

וַיֵּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת יָדוֹ, עַל הַשָּׁמָיִם; וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ אֲפֵלָה בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים.

And Moshe stretched out his hand toward the heavens, and there was thick darkness over the entire land of Egypt for three days.

Rashi asks: Why did HKBH bring darkness on the Mitzriyim? He answers that there were wicked people in Klal Yisroel at that time who did not want to leave Egypt and they perished in the three days of darkness in order that the Mitzriyim should not see them.

This is one interpretation of the possuk (Shemos 13,18):

 וַחֲמֻשִׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם

And one fifth of the Bnei Yisroel went up from the land of Egypt.

This well-known Rashi is based on a Mechilta. What is less well-known is that this is only the first view presented in the Mechilta, namely that one in five Jews left Mitzrayim. The Mechilta presents two more views. That only one in fifty left or that only one in five hundred left.

This is staggering. Given that we know there were six hundred thousand men aged between twenty and sixty, assuming a similar number of women and adding a very conservative two children per family as well as those over sixty years old, we are talking about a nation of at least three million people.

If only one in five survived and left Mitzrayim, that means 2.4 million of Klal Yisroel died in these three days.

But if only one in fifty survived and left Mitzrayim, that means that close to 30 million of Klal Yisroel died in these three days.

And according to the third view, if only one in five hundred survived and left Mitzrayim, that means almost 300 million of Klal Yisroel died in these three days.

Needless to say, these are mind boggling figures. How can this be? And how on earth could the Mitzriyim not have noticed this?

Rav Shimon Schwab gives a fascinating answer which has important repercussions.

When Kayin killed Hevel, HKBH says to him:

מֶה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן הָאֲדָמָה

What have you done? The noise of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the earth (Bereishis 4,10).

Rashi is troubled by the plural of the word דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ (your brother’s bloods). Citing the Gemoro (Sanhedrin 37a), Rashi explains that it refers not just to Hevel’s blood but the blood of all his descendants - **דמו ודם זרעיותיו**.

In other words, Kayin is guilty not just for death of Hevel, but the death of all the descendants that would and should have come from Hevel.

Suggests Rav Schwab, perhaps this is the answer to our question. Maybe only some of Klal Yisroel dies in the makka of choshech, but many descendants would have come from this number. The figures given are at various points in Jewish History, the larger numbers being further down the line. Should we calculate the potential descendants at the time of leaving Egypt, or at the time say of the first Beis Hamikdash or perhaps at the end of days?

Rav Schwab then adds a powerful thought. When we say that six million Jews were killed in the holocaust, those who were guilty of perpetrating this genocide are actually guilty of far more. They are culpable for killing all those who could have come from these six million, tens of millions of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and beyond.

And there are countless other ripple effects. I once heard an estimate that there were 60,000 practising Jewish doctors who dies in the holocaust. Again, those culpable, will be punished for all the chesed that could have been generated from all of these doctors. And so too in so many other areas.

And the converse is also true. When I spoke to a year group of Hasmonean boys recently and told them about Rabbi Dr Schonfeld, I explained that he won’t only get rewarded for the hundreds of youngsters he saved during the war, but all the thousands of neshomos that descend from them will be to his eternal credit too.

Rav Shlomo Heiman, the great Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaas, once braved a frigid and snowy New York day in January 1939 to walk to the yeshiva and give his shiur. Because of the terrible weather conditions, there were very few boys in attendance. But the Rosh Yeshiva gave the shiur as he normally did with the same passion and excitement.

One of the boys gently said to his Rosh Yeshiva, “Rebbe, it’s just a few of us here, why do you need to exert the same energy as if there was a full beis hamedrash?”

Rav Shlomo Heiman replied: “Do you think I am only talking to you! I am talking to you and to your children and to your talmidim and to their children and their talmidim!”

Ripple effects magnify everything we do. They can be very damaging when negative, as seen with Hevel, Mitzrayim and in the holocaust but they can be enormously powerful when it involves and mitzvos and positive actions.

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